SECTION 2

Alternatives/Recommended Alternative

Section 2 describes the range of alternatives that were developed during the Draft EIS phase to correct the existing and future problems identified in Section 1. The alternatives are divided into the "reasonable alternatives" that were considered in detail in the Draft EIS and the "other alternatives" which were eliminated from detailed study. This section also identifies the project's recommended alternative and the basis for selecting it.

Alternatives Development

Initial Planning Phase

As discussed in Section 1, the *Westby-Viroqua Corridor Bypass Study* is a follow up to the *1996 Westby/Viroqua Transportation Study* conducted by WisDOT, the Cities of Viroqua and Westby, and Vernon County. The *1996 Study* provided the framework for both short-term and long-term improvements. Short-term improvements developed by WisDOT and the City of Viroqua at the conclusion of the 1996 study focused on the Viroqua area where traffic volumes are highest. These improvements are summarized as follows:

- Reconstruct USH 14/61 (Main Street) between the south city limits and the Vernon County Fairgrounds to a uniform 16-meter-wide (52-foot) urban cross-section. This project was completed in fall 1999.
- Reconstruct the USH 14/61 and CTH BB intersection that serves as the primary access point to the Viroqua Industrial Park and other ongoing/planned development near the north city limits. This improvement is targeted for construction in 2003.

Long-term improvements evaluated in the *1996 Study* consisted of possible bypass alternatives around Viroqua and Westby, as well as an existing alignment alternative through these communities, and possible one-way street pairs in Viroqua. The bypass alternatives were developed as wide-band corridors within which a more refined location and cross-section would be determined through additional study.

Data Gathering—Existing Resources and Constraints

To assist in refining the wide-band corridor alternatives developed during the *1996 Study* and to evaluate additional alignments, the project team prepared an aerial map showing natural resource and other constraints in the study area. These include stream/floodplain crossings, wetlands, land contours, property boundaries, cemeteries, potentially significant historic properties, former dump sites, the Three Chimneys rock formation, the Viroqua Municipal Airport, and other land use features. This "environmental constraint" data, combined with additional engineering evaluation, served as the basis for developing more precise locations and bandwidths for possible bypass corridors.

Local Government/Agency Coordination

WisDOT established a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) at the outset of the EIS activities to assist the project team in developing and refining the alternatives and evaluating impacts. The PAC includes local officials and other local government representatives, state and federal agencies, citizens, and representatives from the Viroqua and Westby chambers of commerce, school districts, area businesses, and the local historical society. The purpose of the PAC is to keep local officials and other interests up-to-date on project activities, to provide a local link between the study team and the community, and to provide input on the alternatives and their impacts. In addition to the PAC meetings, the project team held individual meetings with local officials and interest groups to obtain input on various aspects of the study. Additional information is provided in Section 7.

Coordination with state and federal review agencies and Native American interests provided an opportunity to comment on the range of alternatives being considered, issues to be addressed in the Draft EIS, and other study aspects. Letters received from agencies during the development of the Draft EIS are included in Appendix C. Agency comments on the Draft EIS are found in Appendix D. Additional information is provided in Section 7.

Public Involvement

Public involvement activities during development and refinement of alternatives and impact evaluation included two public information meetings, three local information centers, newsletters, articles in local newspapers, and meetings with local interest groups and property owners. In addition, letters were sent to property owners adjacent to the Build Alternatives to let them know about upcoming and ongoing field-work including archaeological and historic property investigations. Public input helped the study team to refine the alternatives and evaluate their impacts. The public involvement process was inclusive of all residents and population groups in the study area and did not exclude any persons because of income, race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, or handicap. Additional information is provided in Section 7.

Initial Range of Alternatives Considered

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no additional highway capacity improvements would be made. No improvements other than normal pavement maintenance, spot traffic operational improvements, and minor safety improvements would be made to the existing highway. The effects of future traffic increases would be borne by the existing highway with consequential effects on congestion, mobility, operational characteristics, and safety.

Transportation System Management Alternative

The Transportation System Management (TSM) Alternative would improve traffic operations and safety on the existing highway/local street network. TSM measures include removing street parking, implementing one-way street pairs, adding traffic signals, providing additional turning capacity at intersections, and managing access to limit the number and locations of residential and commercial driveways and field entrances.

Several TSM measures have already been implemented or are planned for implementation in the study area. These are summarized as follows.

- **Reconstruct the USH 14/61 and CTH BB intersection in Viroqua**—This intersection serves as the primary access point to the Viroqua Industrial Park and other ongoing/planned development near the north city limit. The proposed improvement is targeted for construction in 2003, and will consist of a 4-lane urban cross section on USH 14/61 through the intersection with channelization for turning movements, reconstructing CTH BB through the intersection to provide turning lanes, and installing a traffic signal. Although these improvements will provide safer and more efficient access to the industrial park from USH 14/61, they do not address the overall need for additional roadway capacity in the study area.

- **Reconstruct STH 56 (Decker Street) in Viroqua**—STH 56 intersects USH 14/61 in downtown Viroqua. The proposed improvement, targeted for construction in 2005, will upgrade STH 56 to a 2-lane urban cross section with curb and gutter and storm sewer. Although this project will improve local traffic operations in Viroqua, it does not address the overall need for additional roadway capacity in the study area.

- **Extend Chicago Avenue in Viroqua**—Chicago Avenue is north of STH 56, and four blocks west of Main Street in Viroqua. In conjunction with providing a detour route during the 1999 Main Street reconstruction project, Chicago Avenue was extended north to Airport Road. This extension provides additional north-south traffic capacity, and serves Wal-Mart, Jubilee Foods, and other development near the Viroqua north city limit.

- **Locally designated truck route in Westby**—The City of Westby has a locally designated truck route designed to remove through truck traffic from the Central Business District (CBD). The marked route uses Coon Prairie Avenue as a connection to Bekkedal Avenue, which is located east of Main Street. The route ties back to Main Street at Park Street, north of the CBD. The City has indicated the local truck route does provide some truck diversion from the CBD, resulting in less congestion and improved traffic operations on Main Street.

- **Access management on rural portions of USH 14/*61***—The existing highway within the study area (outside the Viroqua and Westby corporate limits) has been designated by WisDOT as an access-controlled highway under Section 84.25, Wisconsin Statutes. Access control regulates the type and amount of access points allowed to connect to a major highway, preserves the traffic carrying capacity of the existing roadway, and enhances safety. Written approval from WisDOT is required for any new local road/street or private driveway connections to USH 14/61. WisDOT is in the process of acquiring access rights along the corridor; this has been completed for the area between CTH GG and Cut-A-Cross Road, and between Viroqua and the USH 14/61 intersection with STH 27/82.

An additional TSM measure that was considered during the *1996 Study* and as part of this study:

- **One-way street pairs in Viroqua**—Options considered in the *1996 Study* are shown on **Exhibit 2-A**. One option would convert existing Main Street (USH 14/61) to one-way southbound from East Broadway Street to South Street. Northbound traffic would use

Center Avenue. A mid-block diagonal connector from Main Street to Center Avenue would be required in the area between East Broadway Street and Church Street, and a mid-block diagonal connector from South Street to Rusk Avenue would be required in the area between South Street and Oak Street. The second option is similar except that the one-way street pair using Main Street and Center Avenue would rejoin with a mid-block diagonal connector in the Terhune Street/South Street area. Under either option, parking would be removed from the west side of Main Street.

Widen Existing Highway Alternative

City of Viroqua—Widening existing USH 14/61 through Viroqua was considered during the *1996 Study*. The final recommendation from that study was to provide a uniform 16-meter wide (52-foot) urban cross section on Main Street between the south city limit and the Vernon County Fairgrounds. This recommendation was carried out during the 1999 Main Street reconstruction project. Prior to reconstruction, the cross section varied between 13 meters (42 feet) and 16 meters (53 feet) in width. The improvements included replacing the deteriorated pavement, curb and gutter, and sidewalk; replacing the utility infrastructure; upgrading the traffic signal at STH 56/82 (Decker Street); and removing street parking except in the 4-block Central Business District (CBD). The present roadway is wide enough to accommodate 4 traffic lanes, but street parking in the CBD restricts capacity to 2 traffic lanes.

Prior to the 1999 reconstruction project, there were 278 street parking stalls along Main Street; 43 in the CBD, and 235 outside the CBD. As a result of the reconstruction, the 235 parking street parking stalls outside the CBD were eliminated for a net loss of 85 percent of the total street parking. Removing the remaining street parking in the CBD would adversely affect the viability of existing businesses and would be inconsistent with the city's efforts to revitalize the downtown in accordance with the goals and objectives of the Main Street Program. Therefore, no additional alternatives were evaluated for providing 4 traffic lanes through downtown Viroqua.

City of Westby—Widening existing USH 14/61 through Westby was considered during the *1996 Study*. The finding at that time was that a uniform 15-meter (49-foot) urban cross section, with street parking removal, would suffice to handle future traffic increases. The existing cross section varies between 13 meters (44 feet) and 15 meters (49 feet) in width. For purposes of the present study, widening Main Street to a uniform 16-meter (52-foot) urban cross section and removing street parking was considered because traffic in year 2025 is expected to be near the threshold for a 4-lane facility. While this cross section would provide 4-lane traffic capacity through the City, removing street parking, particularly in the CBD, is a substantial concern to the City. There are approximately 260 street parking stalls along Main Street; 177 between the south city limit and the CBD, 54 in the CBD, and 29 between the CBD and the north city limit. Additional parking is available on side streets, but is heavily utilized in the CBD. There are no auxiliary parking lots. Constructing off-street parking would require real estate acquisition and building removal.

As part of the PAC activities for this study, the City of Westby indicated that reconstructing Main Street to provide 4 traffic lanes is not a viable alternative due to street parking loss, and because this alternative would not remove through trucks from the downtown (see Appendix C, page C-12). Because capacity improvements in downtown Westby would

require street parking removal, and would not reduce through truck volumes, such alternatives were eliminated from further consideration.

Existing USH 14/61 between Viroqua and Westby—Widening existing USH 14/61 to a 4-lane divided facility between Westby and Viroqua was considered during the *1996 Study*. Year 2025 traffic forecasts indicate that even with a bypass, future traffic on existing USH 14/61 between Viroqua and Westby would require additional capacity. Therefore, adding traffic capacity to existing USH 14/61 between Viroqua and Westby is discussed in conjunction with the bypass alignments under "Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study."

Build Alternatives

An initial range of Build Alternatives (bypass alternatives) as shown on Exhibit 2-B, was developed and evaluated during the *1996 Study*. The initial bypass alternatives consisted of 305-meter-wide (1,000-foot) corridors, and assumed a 4-lane divided rural cross section. Refinements to the initial alternatives for purposes of the present study are discussed under "Alternatives Refinement/Screening." The reasonable range of Build Alternatives retained for detailed study is discussed under "Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study."

Alternatives Refinement/Screening

Alternatives refinement/screening was an iterative process designed to develop a range of "reasonable alternatives" for detailed evaluation in the EIS. The concept of reasonable alternatives is discussed in the Council on Environmental Quality Guidelines for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act, and summarized as follows:

> Reasonable alternatives are those that sufficiently address project purpose and need; for which the overall magnitude of impacts is acceptable to local officials, agencies, and the public; for which adverse impacts can satisfactorily be mitigated; and which are technically feasible to build without undue engineering constraints, challenges, and associated high costs.

The project team developed the reasonable alternatives after considering public comments, input from the Project Advisory Committee and other local interests, comments from state and federal review agencies, and performing additional engineering and environmental analysis. The results of the alternatives refinement/screening process are summarized below.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no additional capacity improvements would be made to the USH 14/61 corridor. No improvements other than normal pavement and structure maintenance, and spot improvements to traffic operations and safety would be made. The No Action Alternative fails to address the key purpose and need issues discussed in Section 1:

- **Existing and Future Traffic**—Based on traffic forecasts for the design year 2025, total AADT volumes will exceed Design Capacity on all portions of USH 14/61 in the study area except in Westby and on a short segment west of Westby. Under present peak traffic volumes, all sections along the USH 14/61 corridor are over Design Capacity, and four sections are approaching or at Maximum Capacity. Under 2025 peak volumes, there

will be a further decline in the level of service such that four of the five sections will be over Design Capacity, and all will be at or approaching Maximum Capacity. Heavy truck traffic is expected to increase to 2,300 per day in Viroqua and 1,300 per day in Westby in design year 2025. The No Action Alternative fails to address the need for additional traffic capacity, and would not remove heavy truck traffic from downtown Viroqua and Westby. The No Action Alternative is also inconsistent with providing an efficient north-south travel route that addresses future traffic demand and growth in the region, as well as serving community resources in Viroqua and .

- **Safety**—There are some locations along existing USH 14/61 that exceed statewide average crash rates and National Intersection Crash Rates. As traffic volumes increase, the number and severity of crashes (particularly at intersections) as well as pedestrian and school bus safety concerns can also be expected to increase.
- **System Linkage and Route Importance**—Due to existing and forecast traffic volumes, existing roadway geometrics, and numerous access points, the existing highway is not fully consistent with its designation as a major transportation link serving southwestern Wisconsin, a component of the National Highway System, a connector highway under WisDOT's Corridors 2020 Plan, or as a designated federal/state long truck route allowing trucks up to 19.5 meters (65 feet) in length to use the corridor.
- **Existing Highway Deficiencies**—Traffic mobility on the existing highway is hampered by numerous access points, a mix of local and through traffic, cross traffic, and turning traffic combined with speed changes and lack of auxiliary lanes.
- **Local Issues**—The high volume of heavy through truck traffic in downtown Viroqua and Westby contributes substantially to congestion and safety concerns for vehicular and pedestrian traffic, and school bus operations. Congestion is incompatible with Viroqua's Main Street Program objectives to revitalize the downtown in a way that attracts visitors, new business, and that offers a safe and pedestrian-friendly environment for shopping and other activities. Although Westby is not in the Main Street Program, it has similar objectives for maintaining a viable downtown.

The No Action Alternative is not a viable course of action for addressing project purpose and need; however, it serves as a baseline for comparison to the Build Alternatives. The consequences of the No Action Alternative are discussed further in Section 4.

Transportation System Management Alternative

The TSM measures that have already been implemented, or are scheduled to be implemented in the near future, help improve traffic flow/operations at spot locations along the USH 14/61 corridor. The extent to which previously considered or additional TSM measures would address project purpose and need is summarized as follows:

- **One-way street pair in Viroqua**—Use of a one-way street pair in Viroqua, as evaluated during the *1996 Study*, is not considered a viable alternative for addressing overall project purpose and need in the study area. Although split routing using existing Main Street and Center Avenue or Center/Rusk Avenue would reduce congestion on Main Street, and would not require widening these streets in the downtown, there would be a substantial traffic increase (including heavy trucks) through residential areas. The mid-block connectors between the one-way street pairs would require up to

seven residential and three business relocations. In addition, parking would need to be removed from the south side of Main Street. Improvements to Main Street between East Broadway Street and the north city limit would require up to ten additional residential and 15 additional business relocations.

While this alternative would improve traffic flow in Viroqua, it would not remove through truck traffic from the downtown. In addition, it would impact residential areas on other streets, and would require several residential and business relocations. Therefore, this alternative was eliminated from further consideration.

- **Remove remaining street parking in Viroqua**—As discussed earlier, the 1999 Main Street reconstruction project in Viroqua provides 4-lane roadway capacity through part of the city where street parking has been removed. Because street parking has been retained in the 4-block CBD, capacity in this area is limited to a 2-lane roadway. Removing the remaining street parking in the CBD would provide a 4-lane roadway through Viroqua, but would adversely affect the viability of existing businesses and would be inconsistent with the city's efforts to revitalize the downtown in accordance with the goals and objectives of the Main Street program. Although eliminating the remaining street parking in the CBD would further improve traffic operations in Viroqua, it would not remove through truck traffic from the downtown. In addition, street parking in the CBD is considered essential to viability of the adjacent businesses. Therefore, this alternative was eliminated from further consideration.

Build Alternatives

The objective of this study was to refine the initial wide-band bypass alternatives evaluated during the *1996 Study*, and to consider other alignments based on additional engineering/environmental evaluation, continued public involvement, and coordination with local officials, interest groups, and state and federal review agencies.

A letter/number designation for the Build Alternatives was developed to assist in describing and discussing the various bypass alternatives. Alternatives in the study area's Southern Section are labeled "S" followed by a number; alternatives in the Central Section are labeled "C" followed by a number; and alternatives in the Northern Section are labeled "N" followed by a number.

The study team presented a wide range of preliminary alternatives to the PAC in July 1999. These included narrowed alignments within the wide-band bypass corridors developed during the *1996 Study*, as well as additional alignments. Based on input from the PAC, several of the preliminary alternatives were eliminated from further consideration, some were modified, and one was added west of Westby. A summary of the alternatives eliminated from further consideration is provided under "Other Alternatives Considered."

The alternatives refined by the PAC were presented for public review at the first information meeting in July 1999. These alternatives are illustrated on Exhibit 2-C. The bypass corridors were assumed to require an average right-of-way width of 61 to 91 meters (200 to 300 feet) to accommodate a future rural 4-lane divided roadway. Based on comments from affected property owners, input from the September 1999 PAC meeting, and additional engineering/environmental evaluation, the alternatives were refined further, including elimination of some alignments. A summary of the alternatives eliminated from

further consideration after the first public information meeting is provided under "Other Alternatives Considered."

The reasonable alternatives presented at the second public information meeting in September 1999 are illustrated on Exhibit 2-D. Key features include the following:

- The range of Build Alternatives was narrowed to those that would tie into and use as much of the existing highway as possible. This was done for several reasons: traffic forecasts indicate that the existing highway between Viroqua and Westby would need to be widened to a 4-lane roadway with or without parallel bypass roadways in place; to minimize farmland and rural residential impacts throughout the study area; to alleviate the need to maintain parallel roadway facilities in the future; and to minimize overall impacts and construction costs.
- Based on traffic volumes that would be diverted to the bypass alignments in 2025, WisDOT determined that a 2-lane bypass of Westby and Viroqua would adequately serve future travel demand. Therefore, the Westby and Viroqua bypasses were reduced to a cross section that would require an average right-of-way width of 46 meters (150 feet) which would vary in areas where cut and fill is required.

Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative serves as the baseline for comparison to the Build Alternatives. The impacts of the No Action Alternative are discussed in Section 4.

Build Alternatives

The Build Alternatives illustrated on Exhibit 2-D, and summarized below, have been retained for detailed study. The alternatives are also shown on the Aerial Photo Exhibit at the back of the EIS. The impacts are discussed in Section 4.

Southern Section

This portion of the study area extends from the USH 14/61 intersection with STH 27/82 south of Viroqua, to STH 56 west of Viroqua and to Upper Maple Dale Road east of Viroqua. Two alternatives have been retained for detailed study, Alternative S-1 west of Viroqua, and Alternative S-2 east of Viroqua.

- **Alternative S-1** is roughly 5.5 kilometers (3.4 miles) in length. It departs from existing USH 14/61 just south of CTH SS. From there it heads west on new alignment where it crosses CTH J and CTH NN; then curves northwest where it crosses Belgium Ridge Road. It then continues northwest where it crosses Sidie Hollow Road and STH 56. It then joins Alternative C-5 in the Central Section.

  Based on initial engineering evaluation, the following cross road connections are proposed for Bypass Alternative S-1: The connection to existing USH 14/61 south of Viroqua would be an at-grade intersection. The connections to CTH J, Belgium Ridge Road, and STH 56 would also be at-grade intersections. Because of existing terrain and

low traffic volumes, grade-separated crossings are recommended at CTH NN and Sidie Hollow Road.

- **Alternative S-2** is approximately 5 kilometers (3.1 miles) in length. It departs from existing USH 14/61 just south of CTH T. From there it heads north on new alignment where it crosses CTH T, CTH SS, STH 56/82, Mahoney Road, and Maple Dale Road. It then joins the C-4 Alternative in the Central Section.

  Based on initial engineering evaluation, the following cross road connections are proposed for Alternative S-2: The connection to existing USH 14/61 south of Viroqua would be an at-grade intersection. The connections to CTH T, CTH SS, STH 56/82, Mahoney Road, and Maple Dale Road would also be at-grade intersections.

Central Section

The central part of the study area extends from STH 56 (west of Viroqua) and Maple Dale Road (east of Viroqua) to the Sherpe Road intersection with existing USH 14/61 south of Westby. Two bypass alternatives have been retained for detailed study, Alternative C-4 east of Viroqua, and Alternative C-5 west of Viroqua. Both of these alternatives rejoin existing USH 14/61 north of Viroqua, and share a common alignment along existing USH 14/61 from about CTH Y to Sherpe Road.

- **Alternative C-4** is roughly 9.5 kilometers (5.9 miles) in length. From Maple Dale Road, it curves northwest where it crosses CTH BB/South Asbury Road, Railroad Avenue, and the Vernon County Farm. It rejoins existing USH 14/61 just north of the County Farm. From there, it follows existing USH 14/61 to Sherpe Road where it would join one of the three Westby bypass alternatives in the Northern Section. The portion of Alternative C-4 that follows existing USH 14/61 would be reconstructed to a 4-lane, divided rural roadway. To the extent practical, the existing roadway would serve as 2 lanes of the future 4-lane facility. Widening would generally be centered on the existing roadway between the Vernon County Farm and CTH Y. Widening would occur along the west side of the existing roadway between CTH Y and Sherpe Road.

  Between the Vernon County Farm and Sherpe Road, Alternative C-4 intersects CTH Y, Three Chimney Road/Old Highway 14, and West Smith Road, all of which connect to existing USH 14/61. Based on initial engineering evaluation, the following crossroad connections are proposed for Alternative C-4: the connections to CTH BB/South Asbury Road and Railroad Avenue would be at-grade intersections; the connection to existing USH 14/61 north of Viroqua would be an at-grade intersection; and connections to CTH Y, Three Chimney Road/Old Highway 14, and Sherpe Road would be at-grade intersections.

- **Alternative C-5** is approximately 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) in length. From STH 56 it heads north on new alignment where it crosses CTH B and Springville Road. It then curves east and follows CTH Y to a point where it rejoins existing USH 14/61 just north of CTH Y. From there, it follows existing USH 14/61 to Sherpe Road where it would join one of the three alternatives in the Northern Section. The portion of Alternative C-5 that follows existing USH 14/61 would be reconstructed to a 4-lane, divided rural roadway. Widening would occur along the west side of the existing roadway.

Based on initial engineering evaluation, the following crossroad connections are proposed for Alternative C-5: The connection to existing USH 14/61 north of Viroqua would be an at-grade intersection. Connections to CTH B and Springville Road would be at-grade intersections. The two connections to CTH Y would also be at-grade intersections, and would be aligned to provide right-angle connections to the bypass roadway.

Northern Section

This portion of the study area extends from Sherpe Road south of Westby to Cut-A-Cross Road west of Westby. Three alternatives were retained for detailed study, Alternatives N-3, N-4, and N-7.

- **Alternative N-3** is about 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) in length. It continues from the common segment of Alternatives C-4/C-5 in the Central Section. It departs from existing USH 14/61 near Sherpe Road, then curves west to follow Tri-State Road. It continues along the south side of Tri-State Road where it crosses Barstad/Hegge Road, then curves northwest on new alignment toward Neprud Road. It crosses Neprud Road, Old Line Road, and rejoins existing USH 14/61 at Cut-A-Cross Road.

  Based on initial engineering evaluation, the following cross road connections are proposed for Alternative N-3: The connection to existing USH 14/61 near Sherpe Road would be an at-grade intersection, and the Sherpe Road connection to existing USH 14/61 would be at-grade. The connections to Tri-State Road, Barstad/Hegge Road, Neprud Road, Old Line Road, and exiting USH 14/61 at Cut-A-Cross Road would also be at-grade intersections.

- **Alternative N-4** is about 5.8 kilometers (3.6 miles) in length. It continues from the common segment of Alternatives C-4/C-5 in the Central Section. It departs from existing USH 14/61 near Sherpe Road, then curves northwest on new alignment where it crosses Tri-State Road. It then heads west where it crosses Hegge Road. It then curves northwest where it crosses Neprud Road, Old Line Road, and joins existing USH 14/61 at Cut-A-Cross Road.

  Based on initial engineering evaluation, the following cross road connections are proposed for Alternative N-4: The connection to existing USH 14/61 near Sherpe Road would be an at-grade intersection, and the Sherpe Road connection to existing USH 14/61 would be at-grade. The connections to Tri-State Road, Hegge Road, Neprud Road, Old Line Road, and existing USH 14/61 at Cut-A-Cross Road would also be at-grade intersections.

- **Alternative N-7** is about 3 kilometers (2 miles) in length. It continues from the common segment of Alternatives C-4/C-5 in the Central Section. It departs from existing USH 14/61 near Sherpe Road. It follows the N-4 alignment to a point north of Tri-State Road, where it then heads north on new alignment toward Unseth Road. After crossing Tri-State and Unseth Roads, it continues north, then curves west to rejoin existing USH 14/61 near Spring Coulee Road.

  Based on initial engineering evaluation, the following cross road connections are proposed for Alternative N-7: The connection to existing USH 14/61 near Sherpe Road would be an at-grade intersection. The connections to Tri-State Road, Unseth Road, and existing USH 14/61 near Spring Coulee Road would also be at-grade intersections.

In summary, the Build Alternatives retained for detailed study have the following key features:

- A bypass west of Viroqua and west of Westbywould consist of Alternatives S-1, C-5, the common C-4/C-5 alignment along existing USH 14/61 between Viroqua and Westby, and either Alternative N-3, N-4, or N-7. The total length would range from 18.7 kilometers (11.6 miles) with Alternative N-7 to 21.4 kilometers (13.3) miles with Alternative N-3. Roughly 3.8 kilometers (2.4 miles) of USH 14/61 between Viroqua and Westby would be used.
- A bypass east of Viroqua and west of Westby would be comprised of Alternatives S-2, C-4, the common C-4/C-5 alignment along existing USH 14/61 between Viroqua and Westby, and either Alternative N-3, N-4, or N-7. The total length would range from 17.7 kilometers (11.0 miles) with Alternative N-7, to 20.4 kilometers (12.7 miles) with Alternative N-3. Roughly 5.3 kilometers (3.3 miles) of USH 14/61 between Viroqua and Westby would be utilized.
- The Westby and Viroqua bypasses would be 2-lane rural roadways. The average right-of-way width would be 46 meters (150 feet), as shown on Exhibit 2-E. Variations would occur where substantial cuts and fills are required. Because future traffic increases will be highest near Viroqua, WisDOT would work with local governments to preserve land adjacent to the bypass for possible future expansion to a 4-lane facility. Right-of-way would be purchased only for a 2-lane bypass.
- The part of USH 14/61 between Viroqua and Westby that would be incorporated into Alternatives C-4 and C-5 would be a 4-lane divided rural roadway. Where practical the existing roadway would serve as 2 lanes of the future 4-lane facility. Widening would occur along the west side of the existing roadway. The additional right-of-way required (on the side where the 2 additional lanes would be constructed) is approximately 47 meters (155 feet), as shown on Exhibit 2-F.
- The part of USH 14/61 between CTH BB and the points where Alternatives C-4 and C-5 join the roadway north of Viroqua, will be reconstructed to a 4-lane undivided urban cross section to match the proposed improvements at the CTH BB/USH 14/61 intersection.
- WisDOT would designate a new bypass roadway as a controlled access highway under Section 84.25, Wisconsin Statutes. This would be done to regulate the type, number, and spacing of access points allowed to connect to the new highway, preserve the traffic carrying capacity, and enhance safety. Reasonable access, including side road connections, driveways, and farm crossings, would be provided where appropriate.

Other Alternatives Considered

Prior to the first and second public information meetings, a number of alternatives were recommended for elimination by the study team, the PAC members, and the public. These are illustrated on Exhibit 2-G, and summarized as follows, along with the primary reasons they were eliminated from further consideration.

Southern Section

A variation of Alternative S-2 along Viroqua's east city limit was considered. It was eliminated because it would have substantially more farm severances than Alternative S-2, it did not follow property lines to the extent possible, and because it would require substantial cut and fill due to hilly terrain.

Central Section

Alternative C-1 was eliminated because it would require substantial cut and fill due to hilly terrain, and existing USH 14/61 would need to be widened to a 4-lane facility even with this bypass in place. Also, the City of Westby felt this bypass alignment would be too far away from the city, thus potentially affecting the community's economic viability.

Alternatives C-2 and C-3 were eliminated because they had more farm severances than Alternative C-1, and would not divert enough traffic from existing USH 14/61 to preclude widening to a 4-lane facility even with this bypass in place.

Alternative C-6 was eliminated because it had more farm severances than Alternative C-7, and would not divert enough traffic from existing USH 14/61 to preclude widening to a 4-lane facility even with this bypass in place.

Alternative C-7 was eliminated primarily because it would not divert enough traffic from existing USH 14/61 to preclude widening to a 4-lane facility even with this bypass in place.

Northern Section

Two additional alternatives at Westby were considered, one that would follow Saugstad Road along the west corporate limit, and one that would follow Barstad/Hegge Road approximately 1.6 kilometer (1 mile) west of Saugstad Road. The Saugstad Road alternative was eliminated from further consideration because of its proximity to the Westby High School athletic field and the City's sewage treatment lagoons. The Barstad/Hegge Road alternative was eliminated because it would not attract as much traffic from existing USH 14/61 as Alternatives N-3, N-4, or N-7, and because of the magnitude of impacts to rural residences and farms adjacent to Barstad/Hegge Road.

Identification of the Recommended Alternative

Two reasonable Viroqua bypass alternatives (S-1/C-5 and S-2/C-4) , three reasonable Westby bypass alternatives (N3, N-4, and N-7), expanding USH 14/61 between the communities, and the No-Build Alternative were presented in the Draft EIS and at the public hearing. After evaluating public and agency comments on the Draft EIS, and further evaluating engineering factors and environmental impacts, the east Viroqua bypass (Alternative S-2/C-4), Alternative N-4 (Westby bypass), and widening existing USH 14/61 between these communities are proposed as the recommended alternative. A description of the alternatives that comprise the recommended alternative is under "Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study".

Basis for Selecting the Recommended Alternative

As a basis for selecting the recommended bypass alternatives, the following factors were evaluated:

- The extent to which the bypass alternatives meet overall project purpose and need;
- Comparison of environmental and socioeconomic impacts; and
- Public and agency comments as a result of the March 23, 2000 public hearing, availability of the Draft EIS, and input from the public information meetings.

Alternatives Comparison—Purpose and Need

All of the bypass alternatives address the overall need for proposed improvements relative to existing and future traffic demand, safety, system linkage and route importance, and existing highway deficiencies. There are, however, differences among the alternatives' ability to meet the project purpose that includes the regional and local objectives listed below.

Address future traffic demand and growth in the region, and improve local and through traffic access to regional destinations outside the study area, as well as to community resources and services in Viroqua and Westby.

The bypass alternatives accommodate future traffic demand and access to regional destinations outside the study area equally well. There are differences, however, between the Viroqua bypass alternatives' ability to *improve local and through traffic access to community resources and services in Viroqua.* The east Viroqua bypass provides more efficient access to the Viroqua Industrial Park and other uses at the USH 14/61 and CTH BB intersection than the west bypass. The south terminus of the east bypass is 4.5 miles from the industrial park, with 0.4 mile of that distance on CTH BB. The south terminus of the west bypass is 7.9 miles from the industrial park using Springville Road as the connection to USH 14/61. About 2.5 miles of that distance is on Springville Road, a rural two-lane road that would likely require some improvements to safely accommodate the anticipated traffic volumes. In contrast, CTH BB is a higher type facility that is better able to safely accommodate the projected truck traffic and other through traffic. It is unlikely that truck traffic destined for the industrial park would travel through Viroqua rather than using the west bypass; however, that possibility is more likely than with the east bypass.

There is also a difference in the access the east and west bypasses would provide to Viroqua. With CTH NN and Sidie Hollow Road being overpasses, STH 56 is the first intersection on the west bypass (for northbound traffic) that allows access to Viroqua. Concerns were expressed during the study about increasing the volume of traffic past Viroqua High School located on STH 56. CTH B north of STH 56 would also provide access; however, the indirection for northbound traffic heading to Viroqua would not make CTH B an efficient access point into the city.

The east bypass provides somewhat better access to Viroqua with entrances at STH 56/82, Mahoney Road (via STH 56/82), Upper Maple Dale Road, and CTH BB.

There is a similar situation for the Westby bypass alternatives. Alternatives N-3, N-4, and N-

7 would provide similar service to Westby at the south terminus of the bypasses because the bypasses take off from USH 14/61 in the same general location. However, after leaving USH 14/61 southwest of Westby, Alternative N-7 is aligned closer to Westby than Alternatives N-3 and N-4, and would allow vehicles to access Westby (via Unseth Road and Spring Coulee Road) more efficiently than from either Alternatives N-3 or N-4.

Improve overall operational efficiency commensurate with the USH 14/61 corridor's designation as a Principal Arterial Highway, Corridors 2020 Connector, National Highway System route, and federal/state long truck route.

All bypass alternatives would improve the overall operational efficiency commensurate with USH 14/61 corridor's various designations.

Improve safety for the traveling public by increasing traffic capacity, reducing conflicts between through and local traffic in Viroqua and Westby, and providing a roadway that meets current design standards.

All bypass alternatives would increase traffic capacity and meet design standards. As noted, it is possible that the west Viroqua bypass (Alternatives S-1 and C-5) would remove fewer trucks from downtown Viroqua than the east bypass because it provides less efficient service to the city's industrial park. Therefore, the west bypass may not reduce conflicts between through traffic and local traffic in Viroqua as well as the east bypass.

In the Westby area, Alternative N-7 may not attract as much through traffic as Alternatives N-3 or N-4 because it provides a less direct connection between USH 14/61 southwest of Westby and the project terminus near Cut-A-Cross Road. As a result, N-7 would be less effective in removing through traffic from Tri-State Road.

Improve traffic flow, pedestrian and school bus safety, and emergency service in Viroqua and Westby by removing through truck traffic from downtown Main Street in these communities.

Assuming the east Viroqua bypass would remove more traffic destined for the industrial park from the downtown than the west bypass, it would be more effective than the west bypass in improving traffic flow, pedestrian and school bus safety, and emergency service in Viroqua.

All of the Westby bypass alternatives would remove through truck traffic from the downtown thus improving traffic flow, pedestrian and school bus safety, and emergency service. Outside Westby, school bus safety on Tri-State Road would be most improved by Alternative N-4 because it would remove the most traffic from Tri-State Road, and there are no residences on N-4 that would require school bus service. If, as assumed, some through traffic would continue to use Tri-State Road rather than the longer Alternative N-7, that through traffic would continue to conflict with bus traffic on Tri-State Road. With Alternative N-3, a greater volume of through traffic than there is today would be forced to mix with school buses and emergency vehicles that use Tri-State.

Enhance local efforts to revitalize downtown Viroqua and Westby as pedestrian-friendly, tourist-oriented communities by reducing heavy truck traffic in the downtown areas.

As noted, the east Viroqua bypass may be more effective than the west bypass in removing traffic from downtown Viroqua destined for the city's industrial park. As such, the east Viroqua bypass may be more effective than the west bypass in enhancing Viroqua's efforts

to revitalize its downtown by reducing heavy truck traffic.

All of the Westby bypass alternatives would be essentially similar in terms of their ability to remove heavy truck traffic from the downtown.

In summary, there are potentially greater differences in the ability of the Viroqua bypass alternatives to address the project's purpose than there are with the Westby bypass alternatives. The east Viroqua bypass may be better able to divert truck traffic destined for the city's industrial park and development at the CTH BB intersection than the west bypass alternative. Therefore, the east bypass may be more compatible with Viroqua's desire to reduce truck traffic and other through traffic from the downtown.

Alternatives Comparison—Environmental and Socioeconomic Impacts

The Draft and Final EIS describe in detail the environmental and socioeconomic impacts of the reasonable bypass alternatives. Following is a comparison between the range of impacts for the Viroqua and Westby bypass alternatives.

Viroqua Bypass Alternatives

Residential and Business Displacements. The east bypass, excluding the common segment (C-4/C-5), would displace two residences and no businesses. The west bypass, excluding the common segment, would displace one residence and no businesses.

Wetlands. The east bypass would affect 0.16 hectare (0.4 acre) of wetlands, and the west bypass would affect 0.5 hectare (1.1 acres).

Threatened or Endangered Species Habitat. No threatened or endangered species or their habitat would be affected by the bypass alternatives.

Cultural Resources. The east bypass is located along the east boundary of the Cina farmstead that contains a round barn eligible to the National Register. Given the nearly 1,000-foot buffer between Alternative C-4 and the round barn, WisDOT obtained SHPO's concurrence on a finding of no adverse effect (see Appendix D). Following selection of the recommended alternative, the project archaeologist surveyed the recommended alternative and located an archaeological site that is potentially eligible to the National Register. (See Section 4, "Cultural Resource Impacts."). The east bypass has been realigned to avoid the potentially eligible site. As a result of the realignment, the SHS concurred that there would be no impacts to the site (see Appendix D). No mitigation is anticipated in conjunction with Alternative C-4. See Section 4 for more information. The west bypass has no involvement with historic or potentially historic structures. The archaeological survey conducted during the Draft EIS phase did not locate any sites along the east or west bypasses that required further investigation.

Hazardous Materials Sites. No hazardous materials issues were discovered along the east or west bypasses.

Public Use Land. No public use land would be affected by the east or west bypasses.

Agricultural Land. The east bypass would acquire 52.2 hectares (129 acres) of agricultural land. Of this total, 12.2 hectares (30 acres) are from the Vernon County Farm. The east bypass would sever seven farms. The west bypass would acquire 62.1 hectares (153.5 acres) of farmland, all from private property, and sever 13 farms. The NRCS rated the farmland along the west bypass

slightly higher than the farmland along the east bypass.

Cost. The east bypass is 6.5 miles long, requires 65.3 hectares (161.2 acres) of new right-of-way, and would cost $21.7 million. The west bypass is 7.1 miles long, requires 79.4 hectares (196 acres) of new right-of-way, and would cost $23.4 million.

Westby Bypass Alternatives

Residential and Business Displacements. Alternative N-3 would displace one residence and no businesses. Alternatives N-4 and N-7 would have no residential or business relocations.

Wetlands. Alternatives N-3, N-4, and N-7 would affect 0.6 hectare (1.5 acres) of wetlands.

Threatened or Endangered Species Habitat. No threatened or endangered species or their habitat would be affected by the Westby bypass alternatives.

Cultural Resources. The Westby alternatives would not affect historic or potentially historic structures. The archaeological survey conducted during the Draft EIS phase did not locate any sites along Alternatives N-3, N-4, or N-7 that required further investigation. Following selection of the recommended alternative, the project archaeologist surveyed the recommended alternative. No additional sites eligible to the National Register were identified during the survey.

Hazardous Materials Sites. No hazardous materials issues were discovered along the Westby alternatives.

Public Use Land. No public use land would be affected by Alternatives N-3, N-4, or N-7.

Agricultural Land. Alternative N-3 would acquire 25.1 hectares (62 acres) of agricultural land and sever 4 farms. Alternative N-4 would acquire 36.4 hectares (90 acres) of farmland and sever 4 farms. Alternative N-7 would acquire 22.3 hectares (55 acres) and sever 4 farms. The NRCS rated the farmland along Alternative N-3 higher than the other two alternatives followed by Alternatives N-7 and N-4.

Cost. Alternative N-3 is 3.7 miles long, requires 25.9 hectares (64 acres) of new right-of-way, and would cost $8.8 million. Alternative N-4 is 3.6 miles long, requires 36.4 hectares (90 acres) of new right-of-way, and would cost $8.5 million. Alternative N-7 is 2.7 miles long, requires 22.3 hectares (55 acres) of new right-of-way, and would cost $4.6 million. It should be noted that while the "construction length" of Alternative N-7 is 2.7 miles, its total length (from USH 14/61 south of Westby to Cut-A-Cross Road is 5 miles, or about 1.4 miles longer than Alternatives N-3 and N-4.

Alternatives Comparison—Public and Agency Comments

Public Comments

Sixty-four (64) people commented on the proposed project during the Draft EIS availability period and public hearing activities, of which three people expressed support for more than one alternative. Of that total, eighteen (18) people supported the recommended east Viroqua Bypass Alternatives S-2, C-4 and two people supported the west Viroqua Bypass Alternatives S-1, C-5. A survey by the Viroqua Chamber of Commerce indicated that eighteen (18) businesses support the east Viroqua Bypass and five support the west Viroqua Bypass. Six people supported Alternative N-3; 16 people supported the recommended

Westby Bypass Alternative N-4; and four people supported Alternative N-7. Four people expressed support for the project without identifying a preferred alternative.

One person opposed Alternative N-7 and one person opposed Alternative N-3. Six people suggested project alternatives other than the reasonable alternatives; eight people either indicated no preference for a particular alternative or expressed opposition to an alternative that would directly affect their properties; and one person opposed all Westby Bypass Alternatives and does not think the project is needed.

In general, the comments about the Viroqua alternatives were consistent with comments the project team has heard from the start of the project. People noted that the east bypass makes the most sense because of its direct connection to the Viroqua Industrial Park. One person also noted that the east bypass was preferable because the city is growing to the east.

Agency Comments

Four agencies commented on the Draft EIS - U.S. EPA, Wisconsin DNR, U.S. Department of Commerce and U. S. Department of the Interior. No agencies commented on particular alternatives. Lack of specific comments regarding an "environmentally preferred" alternative indicate that the environmental impacts are not the deciding factor in selecting a recommended alternative.

On April 11, 2000, the Viroqua City Council voted unanimously in favor of supporting the east bypass alternative. The City of Westby provided an e-mail that stated opposition to N-7, but took no position on Alternatives N-3 and N-4.

Exhibits